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**REMARKS BY
GEETA PASI, U.S. CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES, A.I.
AT THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION FOR VOA
March 4, 2008**

DHAKA, MARCH 4 -- Following is the text of remarks of CDA, a.i. Geeta Pasi at the 50th anniversary celebration of the Bangla Service of Voice of America (VOA) on Tuesday, February 27.

(begin text)

It is a pleasure and an honor to join you to celebrate the 50th anniversary of VOA's Bangla service.

For the past fifty years, VOA has been the world's window onto the United States. VOA conveys the essence of America's political, religious, cultural and social richness and diversity to millions of people around the world, including to those who may never have met an American. In recent years, VOA has increasingly highlighted the growing role of Muslims (including those of Bangladeshi origin) in the United States. VOA has helped Bangladeshis get to know and understand the United States and the American people through its superb programming.

Over the past half century, VOA's Bangla broadcasts have provided accurate and timely information on current events, education, and culture to millions of listeners. Consistently reliable news coverage makes VOA the broadcast choice in Bangladesh. We are very proud that Bangladesh boasts the second largest single country VOA audience in the world.

The media plays a critical role in a democracy. A free press is the life blood of democracy because it acts as a primary source of information to the people. A free press helps to ensure that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said, "A free press allows for an open exchange of views between citizens and their leaders."

In democratic societies around the world, the news media serves as watchdogs for democracy, including by monitoring the activities of the government. They give voice to ensure human rights are protected. They serve as a check against corruption and abuse of power. The United States Government supports press freedom as an integral part of our efforts to promote human rights and democracy worldwide.

With freedom comes responsibility. Journalists and editors have a responsibility to themselves, their news agencies, and their audience to report fairly, accurately, and independently. The media must always remember that it serves the public interest.

The emerging democracies in the Western Hemisphere approved The Declaration of Chapultepec in 1994 to respond to restrictions on freedom of expression. The following quote shows the significance of ethical journalism to long-term success of the news media. The credibility of the press is linked to its commitment to truth, to the pursuit of accuracy, fairness, and objectivity and to the clear distinction between news and advertising. The attainment of these goals and the respect for ethical and professional values may not be imposed. These are the exclusive responsibility of journalists and the media. In a free society, it is public opinion that rewards or punishes.

VOA understands the need for ethics in journalism and has a journalistic code that demands that its reporters adhere to certain principles. These rigid standards include using at least two independent sources, reporting accurately and fairly, and presenting a comprehensive accounting to its audience. In addition, it requires that VOA broadcasters set aside their personal and political views behind when performing official duties.

A free press has tremendous power to influence others. The checks and balances provided by that power are crucial for any democracy. With the public trust comes the responsibility to provide the people news that is authentic and timely.

VOA started broadcasting in 1942 as a response to a need for reliable news in war-torn countries. Today, millions of people are fans of VOA. Why? Because the world trusts VOA's reporting.

VOA has played an important role in Bangladesh ...and around the world. Congratulations to VOA for a job well done! I would like to wish VOA and its loyal fans every continued success for the future. Thank you.

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As prepared for delivery.

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